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INCREASING READING COMPREHENSION THROUGH READINESS  
DIFFERENTIATED BOOKBAGS

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## CHAPTER 1

### PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

The effective classroom is one in which the teacher tries new strategies, teaching methods, behavior modifications, and any other approach available to reach her students' needs. In one small, local school is a rambunctious, rather disorganized group of fifth graders with a highly diverse range of needs. Student cognitive and social skills vary widely, from well above the fifth grade level to those still functioning at a second or third grade level. Mixed in with these two opposite extremes are students having average academic and social abilities. The needs in this classroom are very different, just as in countless other classrooms across the nation.

This research focuses on one area of need within this particular classroom community: reading comprehension. The students in fifth grade at School A take part in a variety of literacy learning tasks. Flexible reading groups of students, based on their reading readiness levels, read through recently published novels, as well as older pieces of literature. They take part in comprehension activities and at-home required reading based entirely on choice; however, the students are often reluctant to read at home and current efforts to motivate students to read are not working.

#### General Problem Statement

Within this observed fifth grade classroom in Virginia, one-third of the students are below grade level in reading and a majority of students exhibit reluctance to read outside of the classroom. As much as one-third of the classroom population also reads at a below-grade level and demonstrates gaps in student reading comprehension. Evidence



for the problem's existence consists of student scores on the Scholastic Reading Inventory and teacher testimony.

#### Immediate Problem Context

School A is an elementary school with a total population of 117 students. This school contains one classroom each for kindergarten, first, second, third, fourth and fifth grade classrooms. The faculty and staff of the school includes principal, secretary, six regular education teachers, librarian, art teacher, music teacher, two physical education teachers, Title I/ reading specialist, special education and guidance teacher, behavioral specialist, enrichment specialist, speech therapist, school health assistant, instructional assistant, technology assistant, two cafeteria workers, and one custodian. The principal of the school divides her time between School A and another school in the district.

The particular fifth grade classroom in question is approximately fifteen feet away from the main office and front entrance of the school. The class houses twenty-one total students. All but two students are at School A since the beginning of their elementary school careers. There are sixteen boys and five girls, with nineteen Caucasian students, one African American, and one Mexican American student. Student ages range from nine to eleven years old. Five students are identified gifted and two are identified as special needs.

According to the Scholastic Reading Inventory, of the twenty-one children in the class, nine are reading at an above-grade level. Four of those children are girls and the other five are boys. Seven other boys read at a fifth-grade level and five children read below a fifth grade level. Of those below-grade level, three children receive Title I



services and two are diagnosed learning disabled. Four of these children are boys and one is a girl.

### The Surrounding Community

The public schools in the district of School A include one high school, two middle schools, and seven elementary schools. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2000, 5,609 students comprise the total population of children enrolled in that district's schools. The community holds 31,894 people with 47% of the population male and 52% of the population female. Approximately 77% of the people are Caucasian, 19% African American, .8% Native American, and .4% of the population is Asian.

The population of men and women over 16 years of age is approximately 25,000. Of those, approximately 61% are in the labor force with 39% not in the labor force. Of those not in the labor force, unemployment is not known. The most common job held in the community is private wage or salary worker. The mean household income is a little more than \$45,000. 8% of the population is below the poverty level, including 507 families with children under 18 and 211 families with children ages five and under.

### National Context of the Problem

Struggle and debate hallmark literacy in America. Teachers spent decades attempting to discover the one proper way to maximize student literacy. Trends to help students read better include emphasis solely on decoding, focus on questioning for comprehension, and whole-language (Cooper, 2003). Though many researchers agree that a balanced literacy program, which integrates all the previously-compartmentalized aspects of literacy into a whole program of direct instruction, questioning, and readiness, debate regarding how to teach literacy still raged (Cooper, 2003). State and national





senates argue, teachers' lounges buzz with gossip, and parents worry that their children are among the many whom seemingly cannot read. For example, the National Reading Panel (NRP), established by Congress in 1997, sifted through the multitude of reading research and determined best literacy practices to present plans for further reading research (NRP, 2000) in 2000. The No Child Left Behind Act signed by President George W. Bush on January 8, 2002, declared 70% of America's largely minority, fourth grade urban population could not read at an instructional level on national reading tests (Bush, 2002).

Unquestionably, literacy cannot be separated from any aspect of life. It is paramount to survival from reading road signs and furniture construction directions to writing driving instructions and memos to the company. Children must be taught literacy as early as possible and they must know how to read as soon as possible. Literacy opens worlds and experiences to students they cannot otherwise experience. With every added skill and ability students develop in their reading repertoire, they add to their possibilities. Students with high reading abilities increase their chances of completing high school and performing better in college education experiences (Baumgartner, Lipowski, & Rush, 2003). Reading often yields individuals with higher level vocabulary, questioning, and thinking skills. Classrooms and reading tasks must be infused with opportunities for students that provide time, ownership, response, and community in and to literacy in order to yield greatest growth (Keene & Zimmermann, 1997).



## CHAPTER 2

### THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

#### Hypothesis

Implementing Book Bags, differentiated by readiness, will increase student scores on the Scholastic Reading Inventory. The strategy of Book Bags is differentiated by readiness (Barber & Phillips). Teachers rank books according to the grade level by considering vocabulary, syntax, and content. The books are then placed inside large bags along with supplementary, supporting materials that extend text and develop student comprehension skills. The Book Bags are a take-home tool that students use strictly outside of the classroom.

Students must be allowed to grow as readers by having access to a variety of texts to read on their instructional level. Reading outside of the classroom is also a goal all students should pursue. By using Book bags differentiated by readiness, supplying reading comprehension tasks and strategies, and increasing student time spent reading outside of the classroom, student growth in reading comprehension can be demonstrated.

#### Literature Review

Classrooms across America are filled with students of varying abilities and teachers are charged to help all of them grow beyond the ability they brought with them in September. According to Tomlinson (2001), a caring teacher is not enough to reach the mixed-abilities in her classroom. Tomlinson plainly states that there are no cookie-cutter students; moreover, students bring varying needs, from those of the advanced learner to the struggling learner. Teachers can differentiate according to readiness and push them



beyond what they are capable of independently, broadening knowledge, understandings, and skills.

For over fifty years, teachers have identified the benefits of readiness differentiation in reading. According to Hester (1952), teachers' responsibilities are to provide and adapt materials and the pacing of them to match students' varying readiness and interests. Classrooms ranging in grade levels and community settings engaged in multiple-level programs. Those classes subsequently experienced student growth in reading levels for a majority of students. For example, in a first grade urban classroom, struggling students reading in fluid, flexible groups were all reading at an on-grade instructional level by January.

Cushenberry's (1966) examination of the Joplin Plan supported the same ideas. According to his research, reading levels of the students involved in the plan rose significantly higher than the national grade-norms. Students were literally placed in grade-level classrooms that supported their reading readiness levels. All fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students involved in the Joplin Program in Irving and Eastmorland, Missouri, grew beyond the grade expectancy level an average of approximately 2 grades. By allowing students to read at their instructional level, children experience advancement and become stronger readers.

Replicating an earlier study, Pressley, Wharton-McDonald, Allington, Block, and Morrow (1998) set out to discover the characteristics of effective literacy teachers. As a result of their qualitative research, Pressley et al. identified nine characteristics of the most effective literacy teachers. Among the other nine characteristics, they found that the most effective teachers matched students' readiness levels with appropriate books and



supplementary materials to aid their students reading those texts. The teachers in the most effective category worked diligently to give individual students books that were not too easy nor too hard for them to read. Instead, they knew the students readiness levels, provided books on those levels, and subsequent materials to aid the students in reading those texts, just as Book Bags.

In another study, Buzard, Jarosz., Lato, and Zimmerman (2001) utilized strategies that differentiated reading tasks based on readiness, interest, and learning profile. Students increased scores on tests which modeled their state reading tests. The tests measured for decoding skills and comprehension; however, because of the design of the study, it is difficult to discern if the results are due to the readiness, interest, or learning profile differentiation.

Baumgartner, Lipowski, and Rush (2003) discovered students must be given texts and placed in groups that were on the students' instructional levels. In addition to the readiness differentiation, students received choice in reading materials and direct instruction in phonemic awareness, decoding, and comprehension skills. The interventions worked together, which resulted in all tested grade levels reading at or above their grade level after the application of the treatments. Readiness differentiation must be incorporated into balanced literacy programs to achieve maximum reading results in the class.

An additional benefit of the balanced literacy program included a positive change in students' attitudes and feelings regarding reading. The amount of children reporting positive feelings about reading in general increased as well as the amount of students who self-reported themselves to be good readers. Baumgartner et al. surmised that the





increases could have been due to individual success in reading. That success experienced was mostly attributed to providing students with texts differentiated according to their reading readiness level.

Book Bags do not only utilize readiness differentiation, but also supplementary materials that increase student comprehension. Opportunities to respond to the text in a writing journal, questions and activities that engage students and extend the text were originally included in Book Bags by Barber and Phillips. Cooper (2003) describes seven strategies for constructing meaning from texts, including visualizing, monitoring, inferencing and predicting, identifying important information, generating and answering questions, synthesizing, and summarizing. Keene and Zimmermann (1997) find inferencing and synthesizing so integral to constructing meaning from texts, they elevate these skills to the level of mosaics of thought, an analogy that describes the integrated pieces of reading instruction that create the whole of literacy. Children often engage in these processes naturally when they retell stories and events or talk about what they think about a movie or something that happened to them throughout the day; however, literacy instruction should focus students purposefully and thoughtfully on engaging in comprehension strategies during and after reading (Keene et al., 1997). Bookbags cause students to engage in those strategies outside of the classroom.

The questions written for Book Bags also attempt to reach all levels of Benjamin Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (Elliott, 2000). This taxonomy leads students to move from fact-based questioning to high-levels of thinking. The taxonomy has six levels of questioning, with each level requiring more sophistication of thought and less dependence on what is physically written in the text to give answers. The levels



Bloom created are knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

Knowledge questions are factual recall. The answers to these questions can be found directly in the text being read. Comprehension questions require students to interpret events, plot, character development, and so forth in fiction. Students must look beyond the surface of text, but are not required to research or delve deeply into the meanings of events beyond the context of the novel itself. Application asks students to take the ideas explored in texts and apply them to real life situations. Analysis breaks problems, events, and so forth in text down into its smaller parts. Finally, synthesis and evaluation cause students to reach the farthest beyond what is directly available in the text. Synthesis causes students to make something new from the ideas they discover in fiction. Evaluation also asks students to make something new: a judgment on something that happens. At the root of the students' answers should be the simple question, "why?" Give evidence to support your new idea and make it generalize to the world beyond the book.

Bear and Barone (1998) also posit that students must move beyond lower level questioning to achieve the most advanced comprehension skills. Comprehension must change as students mature and add to their current schema. They draw on their knowledge of the world around them and their previous experiences with other texts. At the highest levels of comprehension, students add new vocabulary and thought processes to their collection of schema. Book Bags contain questioning cards which promote higher-order thinking and questioning as well as opportunities to write about the text including summarizations, questions, prediction, and synthesizing opportunities.



In a study of 119 children in grades 3, 4, and 5, the 1994-1995 Reading Project Evaluation found that classrooms in which students, taught reading comprehension strategies, increased in their sophistication of using the strategies over the course of a year (Keene & Zimmermann, 1997). The study also showed that comprehension strategy instruction had an effect on the students' abilities to infer and evaluate what they read. By the end of the year, nearly half of the students studied in each grade level were able to read inferentially. At the beginning of the year the third grade had the largest percentage at 34% of students reading inferentially. This growth demonstrates the need students have to be taught and read with comprehension strategies such as those included in Bookbags.

Jacobucci, Richert, Ronan, and Tanis (2002) conducted a qualitative study on the comprehension strategies as well. As a result of their research, Jacobucci et al. asserted that students who receive direct instruction and practice in comprehension strategies increase their reading comprehension. By asking and answering questions of varying degree of sophistication, students become more metacognitive and recognize their thinking patterns. When students are aware of their metacognitive processes, they realize areas of strengths and weaknesses in their reading comprehension. When teachers require students to internalize the comprehension strategies, they become responsible for their overall reading comprehension. Tomlinson (2003) emphasizes students' need for power in the classroom and Book Bags make them responsible for utilizing those comprehension skills.

In 2002, Bongratz, Bradley, Fisel, Orcutt, and Shoemaker found in a study of third and fourth graders in northern Illinois that teaching direct reading strategies that emphasized predicting and inferring, questioning, summarizing, and evaluating increased



student reading comprehension on an independent level. The teacher-researchers utilized many assessment tools, including the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI), to test students' reading comprehension before and after the intervention. Bongratz et al, found that 80 percent of students in the third grade and 78 percent of students in the fourth grade increased their independent reading comprehension. The same comprehension skills that were emphasized in the 2002 study are also utilized in Book Bags through comprehension questions and journaling.

The National Reading Panel (2000) found students must be given structures for reading texts that promote questioning about characters, plot, and events, or factual questions. Summarization and more in-depth questioning are required. Interaction between the teacher and the reader is also essential to growth in student comprehension. Book Bags offer many chances for students to make their thoughts and questions about the text explicit. The teacher must ensure he or she requires students to return their Book Bags at regular intervals during their use, thus ensuring teacher and reader interaction while reading.

Literacy levels are greatly influenced by the kinds of texts available to students. For greatest reading achievement, classrooms must provide students with texts differentiated by readiness. Students must also be encouraged and even required to read outside the classroom setting. Comprehension strategies must be used by students and subsequently practiced in order to achieve highest reading levels possible. Bookbags are differentiated by reading readiness levels and include comprehension strategies that students must use to fully use the bag. This strategy is likely to increase student reading levels.





## CHAPTER 3

### PROJECT OBJECTIVES & PROCESSES

#### Projected Plan of Action

Student scores on Scholastic Reading Inventory reveal gaps in reading comprehension among much of the classroom population. Students in School A's fifth grade classroom demonstrate great reluctance to read outside of the classroom. The students are currently required to read at their home for twenty minutes a night. Very few or no students, return to School A with the required reading completed the following day.

Therefore, as a result of using Bookbags, which require students to read for twenty minutes a night at home, from January 23, 2006 to March 3, 2006, student reading comprehension levels will increase as measured by the Scholastic Reading Inventory. In order to achieve this objective, the following processes are needed:

- 1.) Administer baseline SRI
- 2.) Instruct students how to use Bookbags and associated materials
- 3.) Instruct students when to return Bookbag materials
- 4.) Collect student reading-response journals and answers to comprehension questions
- 5.) Administer post-intervention SRI
- 6.) Administer post-intervention student questionnaire regarding interest in Bookbag strategy (Appendix A)

The population of students using the Bookbag intervention is the fifth grade population of School A. There are twenty one total children, sixteen boys and five girls.



The students are reading novels on an independent level: sixth grade (above-grade), fifth grade (on-grade), or fourth grade (below-grade).

Each student signs out a complete Bookbag on his or her reading level. Each bag contains an appropriately leveled novel, generic response sheet (Appendix B), list of other novels by the same author and on a similar topic (see an example in Appendix C), reading response writing journal, laminated question cards (see an example in Appendix D), and an object or activity to extend the text.

### Project Action Plan

January 20	Administer baseline SRI Instruct students how to use Bookbags & supplementary materials Give students guidelines for using Bookbags: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Turn in writing journals every Tuesday &amp; Friday</li> <li>- Turn in completed questions/tasks, generic response sheet, writing journals</li> </ul> Send home letter to parents explaining Bookbags (Appendix E)
Jan. 23 – 27	Students check out first Bookbag and use in-class for training purposes. (See How To Use Bookbag Appendix F)
Jan. 30 – February 3	Students check out first Bookbag to use at home
Feb. 6 – 10	Continue using Bookbags
Feb. 13 – 17	Continue using Bookbags
Feb. 20 – 24	Continue using Bookbags
Feb. 27 – March 3	Continue using Bookbags
March 6 – March 11	Continue using Bookbags
March 14	Administer SRI

The first day of the research project is devoted to introducing students to the Bookbag. This introduction signals to the students their current at-home reading task is



soon about to change. Showing students the materials inside each bag, and explaining the Bookbags' purposes, piques students' curiosity prior to beginning the intervention.

The following week is a training period. The change from simply reading twenty minutes a night to using Bookbags for twenty minutes a night is a dramatic one for many students. Therefore, a brief training period is necessary to ensure students are equipped with the knowledge needed to most effectively use the Bookbags. The in-class training period allows students to use the Bookbags correctly with the added aid of teacher supervision and ability to answer questions when needed. Since the students are still using the Bookbags, this week is counted as part of the intervention. The use of Bookbags in class should not affect results.

The following week begins a five-week use of Bookbags for twenty minutes a night at home. Students read the books at their own rate. They also interact with the text through a daily writing journal. Once they have read the book, they must complete the included questions and tasks. Finally, the completed materials and Bookbag will be returned. The student will check out another Bookbag and repeat the process.

#### Methods of Assessment

In order to assess the effectiveness of the Bookbag intervention, the Scholastic Reading Inventory is administered to the students in the observed classroom. The SRI is administered as a pre-intervention and post-intervention test. In addition, writing journals and question/task cards are collected throughout the study. These materials are all comprehension strategies the students use. The teacher informally reads journal responses and the answers to the questions and tasks involved in the Bookbag strategy, allowing



expert reader and growing reader to interact with one another about text. No formal assessment is taken regarding the journals or questions.

The students also are given a post-intervention student questionnaire. The questionnaire asks students to describe whether or not they liked the Bookbag strategy. They should support their opinion with specific reasons as to why they liked or disliked the strategy. Students also are asked what changes they would suggest be made to the strategy for future use.





## CHAPTER 4

### PROJECT RESULTS

School A houses a total population of 117 students. Within this student body, the fifth grade classroom utilizes Bookbags for a total of six nonconsecutive weeks. The purpose of using Bookbags is to test the hypothesis that they would increase students' scores on the Scholastic Reading Inventory, a computerized test which determines reading comprehension. The increase in SRI scores would indicate an increase in reading comprehension.

#### Historical Description of the Intervention

The purpose of using Bookbags differentiated by readiness is to increase students' reading comprehension. To accomplish this goal, Bookbags were developed for each reading level included in the study: fourth, fifth, and sixth grade-leveled books. For each set of Bookbags, a box was made that housed the bags. A red star on box and Bookbag indicated sixth grade level books, a blue star indicated fifth grade level books, and a green star indicated the fourth grade level books. Each box contained enough bags to leave one extra inside the box at all times. This process would ensure enough Bookbags would be available for students when a Bookbag was completed.

On February 2, the class was introduced to the concept of Bookbags in a whole class setting. Each student received a parent letter to take home (Appendix D) and a handout that explained how to use the bags (Appendix E). The teacher chose a single bag that showed what was inside each bag. Using the bag, she explained its purpose and how to use it, referring to the handouts. Finally students had opportunity to ask questions about the bags.



The following day, all twenty-one students took the SRI as a pre-intervention assessment. Unfortunately, the initial scores were not printed and were subsequently lost. As a result, the students retook the SRI on the same day. It is likely many students performed poorly on the second test due to frustration or lack of effort. The second gathering of test scores was recorded. This repeated testing introduced a new measure of error in the beginning of the project that could not be corrected. The teacher used the classroom's established reading groups as an indicator of which readiness level Bookbag group was most appropriate for each student.

The first week of using Bookbags began February 6. Each student looked through the bags that corresponded to his or her independent reading level and chose one to use. The students signed out each Bookbag they would use to help the teacher track the location of each bag.

Throughout the remainder of the week, students used their bags for twenty minutes inside the classroom to learn how to use the bags. This in-class use would ensure accurate use of the bags. Students would be able to ask questions of the teacher regarding the materials and procedures inherent in the bags. After this training period, students could take their Bookbags home to read in. At the start of week two, students did just that. They continued to read and respond to the text in their writing response journals for twenty minutes a night.

The modified action plan proceeded as follows:

- |            |  |
|------------|--|
| February 2 | Teacher instructs students how to use Bookbags & supplementary materials   |
|            | Give students guidelines for using Bookbags (Appendix F):  |
|            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Turn in writing journals every Tuesday</li><li>- Turn in completed questions/tasks, generic response sheet, writing journals</li></ul> |



	Send home letter to parents explaining Bookbags (Appendix E)
February 3	Administer baseline SRI
Feb. 6 - 10	Students check out first Bookbag to use in classroom for training purposes
Feb. 13 – 17	Students take home Bookbags
Feb. 20 – 24	Continue using Bookbags
Feb. 27 – March 3	Students do not use Bookbags
March 6 – 11	Students do not use Bookbags
March 13 – 17	Students resume using Bookbags
March 20 – 24	Continue using Bookbags
March 27 – 31	Continue using Bookbags
April 4	Administer SRI & Student Interest Inventory

As stated, the students used their Bookbags at home. The students returned their writing journal to the teacher every Tuesday. Most students consistently returned their writing journals to the teacher; however, after March 20, students were required to return their writing journals at random intervals. This approach ensured that students brought their journals. Since the students had no idea when they would be asked to return the journal, it was more likely they would write in them. The journal checks allowed the teacher to make sure students were reading and responding, but it also allowed the children to interact with an expert reader regarding the text. The National Reading Panel (2000) recommends this interaction between the student reader and the teacher based on their findings from a wide array of studies in reading comprehension.

Once the novel was read, the students answered the questions on the question/task cards (Appendix D). These questions were written to expand students' comprehension of



text by using Bloom's Taxonomy. These questions advanced students' growing comprehension as recommended by Bear and Barone. (1998) When all questions, tasks, and the generic response sheet were completed, each student returned the Bookbag to the teacher. She read and responded to their work, and finally returned it to the student. Meanwhile, the student signed out another Bookbag and repeated the process. Three students completed a whole Bookbag and began reading another. Of those three, only one person finished the second Bookbag she signed out and subsequently began a third over the six weeks of implementation.

On March 31, all students returned their Bookbags to the teacher. The students could have kept their novels to finish, if they were not completed, but no students opted to do so. The students present in the classroom finally ended the study by retaking the SRI on April 4, and the scores were recorded. Each child also completed a student interest survey regarding the Bookbag strategy (Appendix A). Only sixteen post-intervention scores and seventeen interest survey answers are recorded due to an outbreak of the flu in the classroom. The absences could not be avoided and introduced some mortality error.

### Presentation and Analysis of Results

In order to document any change in students SRI scores, the pre-intervention and post-intervention scores were recorded as shown in Table 1. Fifteen of the sixteen students showed an increase in SRI scores after the Bookbag implementation. The mean increase in scores was 56.23 points. Students 7, 8, 10, 11, and 21 were absent during the post-implementation SRI testing.





Tabel 1

Student Before and After Bookbag Implementation SRI Scores

Student	Pre-Implementaion SRI Scores	Post-Implementation SRI Scores
1	1325	1381
2	988	878
3	445	548
4	1051	1080
5	1106	1297
6	809	877
7	1223	.
8	1169	.
9	641	765
10	1241	.
11	1226	.
12	1080	1089
13	250	622
14	997	1123
15	912	930
16	1066	1209
17	847	1026
18	957	1148
19	1046	1220
20	613	723
21	717	.
	Mean Score: 938.52	Mean Score: 994.75
	Median Score: 997	Median Score: 1053

This increase in students' reading comprehension scores on the SRI implies the implementation of Bookbags causes students reading comprehension skills to increase. The Bookbags included many research supported comprehension strategies, such as predicting, inferring, evaluating, and summarizing (Bongratz, Bradley, Fisel, Orcutt, and Shoemaker). To discover if the increase was significant enough to reject the null hypothesis, the data had to be tested. The test best designed to describe the significance of the results from this nonparametric population is the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test (Lowry). Once the data was tested, the p-value obtained is .0009. This value is the



probability of the same results occurring if the null hypothesis were true (Kirkwood). In this case, the null hypothesis is that the implementation of the Bookbag strategy would have no effect on students' SRI scores.

The extremely low p-value indicates the chance of the null hypothesis being true and the same results being obtained is only .09%. This finding provides strong evidence that the alternative hypothesis is true and that the increase in scores is significant.

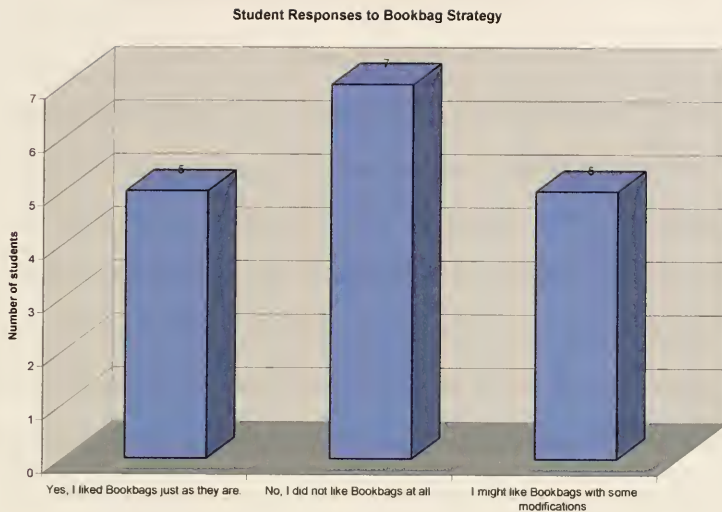
According to the Wilcoxon signed-rank test, the increase in students' SRI scores is likely due to the use of Bookbags.

The students of the observed fifth grade classroom also participated in a post-implementation interest survey (Appendix A). Student responses generally fell under one of three categories: (1) yes, I like Bookbags just as they are, (2) no, I don't like Bookbags at all, or (3) I might like Bookbags with a few modifications. As Chart 1 demonstrates, the spread of student responses is fairly evenly distributed. Five students reported total satisfaction with the Bookbags just as they used them. Five students reported they liked Bookbags, although some modifications would make them better. Finally, seven students reported they did not like the Bookbag strategy at all

This information is difficult to interpret. Approximately one third of the students finally surveyed liked the bags, one third liked them somewhat, and one third did not like them at all. The teacher should take into account the second portion of the interest survey the students returned: what modifications should be made to the Bookbag strategy to make it more enjoyable and effective. If both the students' satisfaction and their suggestions are taken into account then the entire strategy can be modified to maximize student interest and motivation.



Chart 1



Teachers must be wary of these student suggestions (Table 2). Some recommendations take away the basic reading comprehension strategies which are most likely responsible for the increase in SRI scores and are the foundation for using Bookbags to increase comprehension. For example, if a future teacher eliminates the task and question cards, the basic strategies recommended by researchers such as Bear and Barone (1998) are eradicated and student reading comprehension growth may be stunted. The teacher must be aware of the interests of the students, but he or she must also keep his or her primary goal in mind: increase and expand students' reading comprehension.

Table 2

More Choice in Books	No Comprehension Questions/Tasks	No Writing Response Journal	Mix Use of Bookbags with Free Reading	Free Reading with Writing Response Journal	Use Bookbags with a partner	Free Reading Only	Use Bookbags in school
10	6	2	1	2	2	1	1



## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Sources of Error

Upon first examination of the data analysis, it would appear that Bookbags did indeed increase students' reading comprehension. There is less than 1% probability that the increase in scores could have occurred if the null were true. However, when all the factors of the research project are taken into account, the validity of the results must be questioned. The data collected is from an extremely small sample size. Only sixteen pre- and post-implementation SRI scores could be analyzed for significance. The small numbers make it difficult to generalize the results to a larger population. The teacher-researcher must acknowledge the nature of research in the classroom laboratory. The population generally falls under nonparametric boundaries.

It should be noted that while the nonparametric nature of the classroom makes it difficult to generalize findings to the normal-curve population, it does yield interesting and valuable information about the particular population in question: your class of students. The teacher-researcher can discover great things about his or her students through responsible, evidence-based research. The results yielded by classroom-laboratory studies can be replicated to a larger population.

The data collection was compromised from the very beginning of the project. The first group of SRI scores was not recorded. As a result, the children were asked to retake the test on the same day. It is very likely the scores recorded before the Bookbag implementation began are much lower than they should have been. This result would exaggerate the difference in scores before and after the students used the Bookbags. For





example, student 9 had a pre-implementation score of 250 and a post-implementation score of 622. It is highly improbable that the Bookbag strategy increased his reading comprehension, as measured by the SRI. According to the test, Bookbags increased his score by a little less than 400 points. This great gain seems highly unlikely in only six weeks.

Other factors may also have contributed to the increase in scores. Students who are below grade level in certain areas can experience periods of blossoming cognitive ability that may have nothing to do with an intervention such as Bookbags. It is also difficult to say with high confidence that the gains in comprehension solely resulted in the Bookbags. Simple maturation, or growth over time, among the students may have occurred. The students also take part in daily reading groups based on readiness levels, which strive to increase many aspects of students' reading abilities, including comprehension.

The study was also interrupted approximately halfway through its six week timeframe. This cessation of the intervention and subsequent reintroduction could potentially confound the data.

While the data suggests the Bookbag strategy increases reading comprehension, too many sources of error exist in the project design and the population is too small to generalize this conclusion to the overall population.



## Future Recommendations

Bookbags can be another tool in the reflective teachers' tool chest. They are a one-stop shop for many different strategies which are shown to be vital to increasing reading comprehension. Bookbags are also intended to be tools to challenge the above grade level reader and support the below grade level reader. For the classroom teacher, extensive planning and time is required to construct each and every Bookbag. The teacher should be aware of outside resources to generate questions and challenge tasks, such as the internet, other teachers, and published literature books that offer questions, games, and other materials geared for specific novels.

A teacher who wishes to use these bags must also plan to have many choices available to his or her students. He or she should inventory the students to discover books and authors they are interested in and pull from that reservoir of knowledge. The most frequently occurring complaint from the students in the observed classroom was that there was simply not enough choice built into the Bookbags strategy.

For the researcher wishing to replicate or modify this study, careful attention to planning must be made. The action researcher should also be prepared with many Bookbags that will capture their students' interests. More time should be spent devoted to training in how to use Bookbags, and some criteria for excellent writing responses should be developed by the teacher and shared with the students. The writing response journals could be another assessment tool to provide evidence for growth in students' comprehension.

Should the researcher wish to utilize the SRI as his or her method of assessment, he or she must be aware of how the program works to avoid multiple testing problems. A



more consistent and longer period of time devoted to Bookbag implementation will increase the validity of results gleaned from a study similar to this one. A larger sample size is always more valid as well, although the teacher-researcher should not disregard his or her nonparametric student population as invalid. This kind of research yields much information about particular students in question.

Literacy will always be a prevailing issue and argument among educators. It is up to responsible teachers to become action researchers to provide a larger body of evidence to end the arguments and discover strategies for a balanced literacy program. Each new piece of evidence we provide will add to the larger picture of effective reading instruction. For now, the responsible and effective teacher can devise and implement reading comprehension studies to best teach his or her students. The Bookbag strategy may be one that researcher wishes to include in her bag of ideas.



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## APPENDICES



## Appendix A

Name: \_\_\_\_\_



### Tell Me What You Think

1.) Tell me what you thought of the Book Bags. Did you like using them? Did you not like using them? Please write me 2-3 sentences that explain why you thought the way you did of the Book Bags. Please be specific because I will use your thoughts to help me use Book Bags in the future.

2.) Imagine we have to continue using the Book Bags for the remainder of the year. What would you change about them to make them better, more enjoyable, or easier to use?



## Appendix B

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

### Tell Me

Tell me the title of the book you read:

\_\_\_\_\_

Tell me who the author is:

\_\_\_\_\_

Tell me who the illustrator is (if there is one):

\_\_\_\_\_

Tell me your favorite part and why you liked it:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Tell me some words you learned:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Tell me something you want me to know about the book that you haven't written about yet:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_





## Appendix C

The following information goes with Among The Hidden, By Margaret Peterson Haddix.

\* \* \*

Here are some other books you may enjoy!

Books by Margaret Peterson Haddix:

- 1.) *Shadow Children* Series  
Among the Hidden  
Among the Imposters  
Among the Betrayed  
Among the Barons  
Aladdin  
August 31, 2004  
Among the Brave  
Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing  
April 27, 2004  
Among the Enemy  
Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing  
May 17, 2005
- 2.) Running Out of Time  
Aladdin  
February 1, 1997 (Reprint edition)
- 3.) Double Identity  
Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing  
August 23, 2005

Books similar to *Among the Hidden*:

- 1.) The Giver  
By: Lois Lowry  
Laurel Leaf  
September 10, 2002
- 2.) The City of Ember  
By: Jeanne Duprau  
Yearling  
May 25, 2004 (Reprint Edition)



## Appendix D

### Among the Hidden

By Margaret Peterson Haddix

1. The author doesn't specify the setting for *Among the Hidden*. Where and when do you think it takes place?
2. Luke's family is terrified of the government. What are some of the tactics the government employs to make ordinary families like his feel powerless?
3. How are the "barons" different from families like Luke's?
4. The Internet made it possible for Jen and Luke to connect with other hidden children. It helped them build a community of peers. Do you use the Internet to connect with people who share interests with you?
5. Was Jen's march on the president's house courageous or foolish? Why?
6. Jen is a third child, but her stepfather is a member of the Population Police, the brutal organization devoted to discovering people like her and bringing them to a harsh justice. Discuss his character. Is he a hero, a villain, or both?
7. The last time Luke saw Jen, he told her, "It's people like you who change history. People like me – we just let things happen to us." What does this mean? Are you a person who makes things happen or are you a person who watches things happen?
8. *Among the Hidden* is fiction, but in China, there is a law that strictly limits family size. Why might a country do this? Do you agree or disagree with the policy?

### \* Challenges\* (Choose One To Do)

- 1.) Pretend you are the chief propaganda officer of the Population Police. Create a bumper sticker or billboard reminding ordinary citizens that third children are against the law.
- 2.) Design a new cover for *Among the Hidden*. It should be completely different from the one you have. Write a sentence or two to describe what your cover depicts and why you chose your cover to look that way.



## Appendix E



February 7, 2006

Dear Parents,

Today we started a new at-home reading project called Book Bags. The students in the class are now able to choose a book and sign it out to bring home from a class library. We will be using these Book Bags for the next six weeks.

Everyone will be asked to use their Book Bag for a total of 20 minutes each night. Students will be using these Book Bags for their already required 20 minutes of at-home reading.

The purpose behind these Book Bags is to provide your children with an opportunity to read books of their own choice. They will be able to select a Book Bag that is leveled to match his or her own needs individually. There are also questions, activities, and toys and games that are included that may help to increase reading comprehension as well! They also have a writing response journal included in each bag that will give them an opportunity to respond to the text nightly. I have asked that they turn in their writing journals every Tuesday so that I can see how they're reading is coming, answer any questions they may have, and just respond to their writing myself. A weekly grade will be taken for this writing journal.

Please help your children to use the Book Bags and encourage them to return the bags back to school in the same condition they left, since some of the books belong to Mrs. Wood and some belong to me.

Look for Book Bags to start appearing at your house on Monday, February 13! Thank you! Your support in your child's reading development will make a big difference!

Sincerely,  
Mrs. Wydner



## How to use Book Bags...



- 1.) Sign out any Book Bag that is in your group (red, blue, or green star). You should use your Book Bag for 20 minutes a night at home, whether that is reading, answering questions, or completing a challenge.
- 2.) Take the Book Bag home and read the book inside. After every evening of reading you should respond to what you have read in the writing journal provided. You can write how it makes you feel, record favorite quotes, draw pictures you saw in your head, or any combination of writing and drawing you can think of. I will collect the journals every Tuesday. **YOU MUST BRING THE JOURNAL TO SCHOOL ON TUESDAYS!** A weekly grade will be kept and I will respond to what you write/draw in your journal.
- 3.) Once you have finished reading the book, there are index cards with questions and challenges for you to complete. You should use your journal to answer the questions. You may choose one of the two challenge activities provided and complete it as instructed.
- 4.) There is also a game or object included in your Book Bag. It is there to remind you what the story you're reading is about. It is just for fun!
- 5.) When you have read the book, completed the questions, and finished your challenge, you may return your Book Bag. I will check that all the materials the bag began with are there and then you may sign out another one.
- 6.) HAVE FUN!





Sweet Briar women do not lie, cheat, steal or violate the rights of others.  
Therefore, I pledge to uphold all standards of honorable conduct. I will report myself  
and others for any infraction of this pledge.

*Lindsey D. Wydner*









